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WHAT is now the state of Iowa was first surveyed between March 1832 and August 1859. Based upon this origional United States Land Office Survey, it has been estimated that 29,412,580 acres (82 percent) of the total state land area was covered by tall prairie grass at that time with the remaining 6,680,926 acres (18 percent) in forest. Today, less than 2,942 acres or 1/10 of one percent of the Iowa landscape remains in prairie. The state forest resource has likewise decreased. A comparison of forest in Iowa at the time of settlement and at present illustrates a dramatic reduction in acreage. Our forest resources continue to be diluted and jeoparidized by commercial, residential, recreational and agricultural development pressures. Projected demand threatens the health and survivability of our remaining forest resource.

The remnants of Iowa's forest persist at quarry spoils, along some fence rows, lining creek beds, in wooded pastures, in savanna-like landscapes, or in the complex woodlands of the river corridors. The forest areas of Iowa offer a multitude of values ranging from watershed erosion control and wildlife habitat to recreational, aesthetic and spiritual.

Permanent forest cover protects soils and water resources along our river corridors by decreasing soil erosion and water runoff. The removal or disturbance of forest areas greatly increases erosion potential. The effects of cutting, clearing and grazing practices on soil and water resources must be of a primary consideration to future forest planning and management.

In a state which so intensively uses every available acre for crop and livestock production, suitable habitat for wildlife is at a premium. Although some wildlife species have adapted to agricultural landscape, the majority of species depend on the remaining four percent of the states forest lands. The once continuous wooded river valleys which provided travel corridors for wildlife have been fragmented into scattered islands impeding wildlife movement. The vulnerability of these island habitats must play a critical role in future forest planning and management.

Our forest landscapes with their variety of wildlife, topography, geology, water, scenery and plant resources are popular settings for many of our recreational activities. Compatable uses include hiking, fishing, controlled hunting, wildlife observation and nature education, to name a few.

If the availability of gasoline and petroleum supplies become increasingly limited and consumer costs continue to rise, then leisure time recreation demand will shift from interstate to greatly increased "in" state visitation of natural areas. Peak weekend vacation use is projected to increase greatly resulting in a potential "crisis" in lcoal recreation demand. It is not that existing parks and recreation areas cannot hold all who come, but that after a certain saturation point the health and survivability of the natural area becomes jeopardized.

It takes more than towns and railroads and cornfields to make the state of Iowa a pleasant place in which to live. It is the natural places of beauty which offer aesthetic, physical, educational and in the broad sense, religious values. As we gain an understanding of these environments we will come to respect the role that our natural forest communities play upon the landscape which enriches our daily lives.

It becomes obvious that a high planning and management priority must be assigned to our remnant forests. It is only this small proportion of the state that can provide suitable environment for our wildlife, recreation, aesthetic and spiritual needs. Unfortuantely, the very attributes that make these areas suitable and attractive for these uses are the same attributes that attract nonconforming land uses such as residential, commercial and agricultural development. The principles of sound land use management based upon land capabilities dictates generally that residential, commercial and agricultural development locate outside of the immediate forest corridor area. We must learn to facilitate maximum use within the limits of the resource, in order to assure future generations that the resource will be available for their stewardship. In economic terms the value of one acre of Iowa forested land (Iowa ranks 41st in the nation in total forest area) must represent ten or twenty times the value of that same acre if it occurred in a state containing a large proportion of forest. In essence, Iowa's forest lands have a value under rated and misunderstood by most of her citizens. In a time of material and energy crisis, the erroneous concept that food, water, soil, lumber and fuel are inexhaustible and that local supplies are plentiful is still a dominant feature in the thinking of many Iowans.

Threatened with exhaustion of our natural forest heritage, it is imperative that the citizenry of this state at last awaken to the necessity of protecting what is left. In this time of energy and environmental crises, our incentive to protect all that we can has never been clearer, nor the opportunity to do so more favorable. We still maintain the advantage over more ancient cultures to protect as many remaining examples of our origional forest communities as we can, but time is running out.

Not only must our remaining forest lands be protected, but replacement plantings could be encouraged in areas thinned or denuded by development. Much of our present woodland has a life expectancy of only one generation because the seedling habitat beneath the canopy has been significantly modified or eliminated due to grazing pressures by domestic animals and by the replacement of the forest floor with lawnscape in residential areas. In these areas only the parent canopy remains. The natural regeneration of these woodlands has largely been ignored. Is it possible for man to rebuild these disturbed harmonies from their nakedness and restore the ancient fertility, productivity, and healthfulness which took nature centuries to create?

The reestablishment of an acceptable balance between the two most broadly characteristic distinctions of Iowa's landscape, woodland and plow land, is admittedly a utopian goal. The following message presented by Harriett S. Kellogg in 1919 to the citizenry of Iowa embraces our contemporary challenge and aspirations for the future of our forested landscapes:

"A natural woodland carpeted with a mosaic of wild flowers appeals to each individual according to his inherent traits of character. One estimates it in terms of cord-wood and acres; another vanishes all utiltarian ideas, seeing it only as a most glorious heritage to be preserved that future generations may also enjoy its beauty, while the third correctly imagines a golden mean where in both the utilitarian and the man of sentiment may be satisfied." ■